

THE ART OF LIGHT AND DARK / THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE
Doctoral Research Papers in the History of Art

Friday, 14 March, 2014
Bowland Lecture Theatre, Berwick Saul Building
12.30-6.30pm

ABSTRACTS

Melissa Herman

Performance of Death: The public and spectacular nature of burial in early Anglo-Saxon England

Death, and more specifically burial, has long been established as a point of significant meaning and ritual in both Christian and non-Christian society. Burial represents a transitional point of interaction between the living, the dead, and the afterlife. Early Anglo-Saxon graves, both cremation and inhumation, were usually furnished with grave goods and could be elaborately constructed burial chambers topped with mounds of earth, making the sites clearly visible from a distance. Given the emotive nature of death and the afterlife in Anglo-Saxon England it is unsurprising that the methods of burial could be elaborate and highly ritualistic. A large and ceremonial burial would have been an extremely visible act, acting as almost a performance for public consumption as a pyre, gravesite, or burial chamber was constructed and the body or ashes were interred along with practical and precious goods. In considering burial rituals a public act or spectacle, the choice of the quantity and quality of the grave goods takes on further significance, illustrating a culture that values visible displays of wealth as signs of status in life and, arguably, in death. The quantity of furnished graves for all levels of society, the varied and often significant types of items buried, and the persistence of the practice over centuries into the period of Christian conversion all suggest that, for the Anglo-Saxons, death and what came after was, not surprisingly, of considerable importance, and involved certain recognized rituals, speaking to complex understandings of the afterlife as well as a desire to make a public statement by those responsible for memorializing it.

Philippa Turner

Everilda: York Minster's Invisible Saint?

St Everilda (d. c.700) was a Wessex noblewoman who fled north with her companions Bega and Wulfreda to pursue religious life. She was endowed with land by York's bishop, Wilfred, and became abbess of the convent she founded there. Little else is known of her life, and possible Anglo-Saxon cult, and so thus far she has received little scholarly attention. This paper will present hitherto undiscussed documentary evidence which indicates that St Everilda's cult was located at and promoted by York Minster in the late medieval period. It will situate the physical aspects of the cult within the sacred topography of the Minster, asking how they may be interpreted both in relation to other cults within the interior and those at other institutions. It will also ask how we should assess the Minster's promotion of Everilda within the wider context of female saints' cults in late medieval England. This demonstrates that far from being the near-invisible figure presented in the historical record, Everilda was a visible and significant saintly presence within the late medieval Minster.

Bogdan Cornea

Creation at the limit: Light and Darkness in Jusepe de Ribera's 'Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew'

My paper focuses on two early paintings by Jusepe de Ribera's (1591-1652) both depicting the *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (c.1628-30, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence; c.1620, Cathedral of San Nicolò, Nicosia). The two canvases are amongst Ribera's most dramatic handling of the chiaroscuro, a feature that has been interpreted in art historical literature overwhelmingly as a

means to achieve a strong sense of relief for figures and to dazzle the viewer. My paper argues that the chiaroscuro raises questions about both corporeal and pictorial limits and their inter-relationship. And it does this by insisting on their materiality. The paintings emphasize the limit of or boundary between life and death through the removal of skin, which is also a limit or boundary. To address this, my paper interrogates Ribera's treatment of violence in relation to the body of the Saint and to painting and the painting itself. The correlation between chiaroscuro, bodies, and violence I believe draws attention to a significant aspect of Ribera's images of flaying – an innate concern with their own presence as painting in terms of self-presentation and self-awareness.

Melanie Polledri

Darkest Africa on the Imperial Stage: Edwardian Britain's visual representations of its Colonised Peoples

In 1906, the second-generation New Sculptor William Goscombe John exhibited his bronze head of a pygmy chief, *Bokani* (1905) at the Royal Academy in London. The piece is a significant, yet problematic, visual representation that contributes towards the construction of early twentieth-century values concerning empire, ethnicity and racial difference: were these values reactionary and, therefore 'new' as Edwardian, or a continuation of preceding Victorian ideologies? *Bokani*, a product of what Bernth Lindfors termed "ethnological show business", was brought to Britain from the forests of the Belgian Congo, by the traveller and big game hunter, Major James Harrison. This small group of Mbuti pygmies formed a much publicised spectacle that toured Britain and Europe entertaining audiences at venues from Buckingham Palace to music halls. The pygmy troupe also underwent extensive pseudo-scientific examination from interested parties such as the Anthropological Institute in London; it was under the auspices of scientific interest that John was commissioned to model the group's chief. John's *Bokani* pivots at the intersection of art, anthropological sciences, and popular entertainment. This paper will examine how it questions and endorses notions of racial difference through which we can measure John's socio-cultural attitudes against Britain's wider Imperial policies towards its colonised peoples.

Lyndsey Smith

'There was Darkness over the Whole Earth': Anglo-Saxon Ivory Crucifixions and the complexities of carving Darkness into White Ivory

The early medieval period was one marked by a near obsession with sensory experiences concerning the holy and spiritual, and the artworks produced for ecclesiastical institutions and individual veneration were suitably extravagant to capture and amaze the viewer's sight and ability to touch. One media in which sight and touch were especially favoured was that of ivory, with many a surviving carved piece being lovingly rubbed or kissed during worship due to its representation of holy figures. Strangely enough, of the range of holy subjects that Anglo-Saxon carved ivories could have depicted, the most repeated image was that of the Crucifixion of Christ. Considering the biblical scene, and the repetitive Evangelist proclamation of "darkness over the whole earth" (Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44, Matthew 27:45), it is difficult to comprehend at first glance the reoccurring nature of such a dark image into what would normally be considered the lighter, and more holy, colour of white. It is the aim of this paper to consider such complex artistic choices in light of the dark nature of the subject matter contrasting the whiteness of ivory, all the while being handled and venerated from a very close vantage point, and will consider contemporary theological discussions that would support such a practice in Anglo-Saxon England.

Amy Tobin

A Group Show of Our Own: rethinking the politics of visibility in 'Womanhouse' (Los Angeles, 1972) and 'A Woman's Place' (London, 1974)

Womanhouse, a large-scale art environment installed in a Los Angeles mansion for one month in early 1972, has passed into the history of 1970s art as iconic. It is iconic of a feminist politics in art practice, as well as a shift in media (installation), in production (collaboration) and content (woman's domestic life). In histories of second-wave feminism, *Womanhouse* has come to mark an intervention in the macho spaces of both the art school and the gallery in its exhibition of young women artists work. The installation, in an abandoned Los Angeles mansion, straddled private space and public show, studio and exhibition invoking and evoking the concurrent politicisation of women through consciousness-raising speak outs. Yet the complexity of the installation and its importance as a pedagogic tool is often lost with such an analysis. This paper seeks to trouble the association of *Womanhouse* with a 'containable' idea of Feminist Art by situating it within the larger context of its production and reception.

I will foreground the importance of the Women's Liberation Movement in directly effecting women's (and men's) conception of artistic practice, both through personal empowerment and the sharing of ideas. I argue that the emphasis on the group and the local in feminist politics fostered an alternative network of artistic exchange in which the object or idea moves between social groupings. This will not be read as a straightforward mimicking of consciousness-raising (Judy Chicago acknowledges her ignorance of the concept at the time) but as an articulation of collaboration and collectivity in artistic practice as a political and pedagogic tool.

The paper will consider two levels of collaboration. Firstly in *Womanhouse*, which combined the collective work of renovating the dilapidated building with individual authorship (Judy Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* or Faith Wilding's *Crocheted Environment*). And, secondly in the dissemination of *Womanhouse*, through Johanna Demetrakas' film, to a UK audience and its subsequent re-working as *A Woman's Place (14 Radnor Terrace)* in South London. I aim to map characteristics of feminist political organisation onto this exchange, analysing the context of both installations and noticing their differences and similarities. As such I propose a feminist model of artistic interaction, not dependent on simply making women's art more visible but on the intervention, development and experiment of artistic practice from a feminist perspective.

Livia Lupi

Visibility and Invisibility in Fra Angelico's Painted Architecture in the Cappella Niccolina

My paper aims to explore issues of visibility and invisibility in relation to painted architecture. I will focus on Fra Angelico's Cappella Niccolina in the Vatican and discuss how the artist articulated the painted architecture with areas of light, dark, visibility and invisibility. The interplay between visible and invisible parts of buildings in the Niccolina defines ambiguous architectural settings that have been explained as being a pictorial representation of the renovation plans for Old St Peter's. The comparative approach between painted and real architecture constitutes the main, if not the only tool scholarship has adopted for the analysis of architecture in painting, but with this paper I hope to show that such an approach is often unproductive and needs to be supported by the understanding that, although they have a great deal in common, painted and real architecture are ultimately two different things. I intend to illustrate that it is precisely through the alternation of what is made visible and what is not, of what can and cannot be explored that painted architecture differentiates itself from its three-dimensional counterpart and is able to articulate a strong and seemingly unchangeable relationship with the narrative it hosts.

James Hillson

Reconstructing St Stephen's on Paper: Practicing Antiquarianism in the 19th and 21st Centuries

On 16th October 1834, St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster was gutted by fire, leaving behind only smouldering ruins. This dramatic event, however, had been but the culmination of a series of re-appropriations and restorations which stand between the modern scholar and this influential building's medieval form. Increasingly a rallying cry against the perils of 'architectural innovation' and indifferent restoration for the interested Antiquarians of the turn of the eighteenth century, the building became subject to a series of publications intending to record, reconstruct and sometimes even re-imagine the building for posterity. Between 1790 and 1850, at least eight sets of drawings, four publications and one exhibition were produced making it one of the best recorded and thus most diversely problematic non-existent buildings in medieval architecture.

This paper aims to address two interpenetrating problems simultaneously – firstly, the causal effects of the nature, processes, surrounding circumstances and motivations of these Antiquarian productions and, secondly, the difficulties encountered in utilising this evidence for a modern reconstruction attempt, the partial focus of my PhD thesis. By focusing on four case studies within the upper chapel (the window articulation, the longitudinal section, the 1320s arcading and the murals of the southwestern bay) it will explore four specific areas of interaction between historical and contemporary restorations. In the process, the paper will engage with concepts and methodological issues applicable for any buildings suffering from the visible impairment of material absence.

Heidi Stoner

'Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mabpungyfa?': Kings in Anglo-Saxon England

In a period before the depiction of kings, the visibility of the ruler is problematic: where are the kings whose names we know and what does kingship look like? Yet we know kings cannot have been invisible. We are told that kings need to be visible on the battlefield. We are shown the incredible wealth and ornament associated with kingship in burials and surviving finds from the period. These signifiers of kingship come to the surface from the so-called 'dark age' and give light to a group of diverse men and many different ways in which power and kingship might be displayed. Textual sources emphasise Christianity as changing and transforming Britain, from war-lords to Christian kings. In looking closely at both texts and images, perhaps it is possible to imagine how the manipulation of imagery may have been used to redefine kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. This paper will look at exemplars of kingship, specifically those that come in with Christianity and compare how they are similar and dissimilar to earlier conceptions of kingship. Further, it will examine the idea of kingship both every-day and ideal.

Dorothy Nott

Dawn or twilight? Light and dark in two different representations of Waterloo

My paper will illustrate the way in which light and dark are used in two paintings of the dawn of Waterloo by Elizabeth Butler (1846-1933). Painted twenty years apart they offer very different interpretations. The first focuses on the men as they are waking, rising from their flimsy shrouds as two mounted soldiers arrive to sound the reveille. The tension is palpable in this hour before daybreak

when “the pulse of nature would appear to beat most faintly”.¹ The horizon is turning creamy-white as pale sunlight streaks the faces of the central figures against the dark background in a dramatic representation of awesome premonition.

Against this, the second painting initially appears very calm. Here, Butler has centered her attention on the four trumpeters sounding the reveille, all mounted on splendid white horses which catch the light as it falls on them gradually as the sun rises across the canvas. Instead of dwelling on the mixed emotions of the men, this work privileges the rousing call of the reveille as the horsemen are profiled against the horizon, their eerie isolation resonating with appropriately apocalyptic visions in the shadows of breaking daylight.

¹ W.H.Pennington, *Sea Camp and Stage*, 1906: 44.